**Minutes**

Berea Human Rights Commission

Wednesday, July 21, 2021

Special Called Meetings of the Berea Human Rights Commission

Held by video teleconferencing per KRS 61.826

This meeting’s video may be viewed at: <https://www.facebook.com/bereakygov/videos/541121463913752>

**Roll Call**

**Present**: Sharyn Mitchell, Gene Stinchcomb (Chair), Peter Hille (Secretary), Virginia Bland, Randy Dinsmore, Robert Johnson

**Absent**: Janelle Lakes Davenport

**Guests**: Ed Easton Hogg, Deandre Walker

**Public**: Shane Morris, Jackie Bowling, Ed Lafontaine and Bob (inaudible: Newton?)

**Tech support**—Daniel Brindley

Call to Order at 6:00 PM

**Announcements**   
Fort Mitchell is the 23rd city in Kentucky to adopt a Fairness Ordinance, most are in central and northern Kentucky.

Supplemental sent by Robin Adams from the Attorney General’s Office regarding changes to the open meetings laws, acknowledgement page to be signed and returned to the City. Chair will re-send to the Commissioners.

Hille discussed Governor’s new mask recommendation for public settings due to rising COVID numbers, notes potential for this to interfere with ongoing in person meetings.

**Treasurer's Report**

Chair has checked with City Administration, BHRC has a $1500 line item appropriation for this year starting July 1, 2021. No expenditures this year to date.

**Approval May 19, 2021 Minutes**

Motion Hille, second Mitchell, approved.

**Old Business**

Discussion of BHRC meetings: Reviewed decision to keep regular meeting 3rd Wednesday of each month at 6:00, all present agreed.

**New Business**

Discussion with Edd Easton-Hogg, on promoting better racial relations and building bridges in Berea. Easton-Hogg is a Berea native, has psychology practice with office in Old Town and also has farm near Big Hill. Noted the ethics of his profession include engagement in the community. Has been trying to apply that with service to the community and community building. Sponsored a mural in Berea of Mary Merritt who cared for soldiers and Spanish flu victims. Wants to lift up stories of people how have served others worked to break down barriers who were themselves disenfranchised individuals. The mural got a lot of attention, had a good impact, created good discussion.

Primary, secondary and tertiary intervention are ways to engage to generate positive outcomes, create change. Has an intention with the farm to support people who are having a hard time, bringing together performers, artists, and others spreading messages of hope. This is a primary intervention—touches into the community that have multiple effects.

Easton-Hogg introduced Deandre Walker who he met out in front of his office earlier this summer.

Walker (a returning citizen) shared his story of how he got off bus in Berea, but needed to get to Richmond, and Easton-Hogg gave him a ride. Walker wants to start a landscaping business, bring together job equality to anyone who might need it. A lot of convicted felons, as he is, are struggling, wants them to attain employment and a steady piece of hope. Wants to erase the stigma (of incarceration). Wants people to come together and add unity to community. Seeking to create a new LLC. Want people to not be afraid to have formerly incarcerated persons as workers.

Easton-Hogg noted that on the ride to Richmond he learned Deondre needed stable housing and employment. He is introducing Deondre to networks of professionals here, such as accountants, helping him get set up. Most people coming out of incarceration come out with literally nothing and minimal help. Challenges include getting ID, just getting a driver’s license can be a long hard process.

Interested in creating change. Peacemakers, a local motorcycle group, rented Easton-Hogg’s venue, Owl Eyes Farm, last weekend. Some were concerned but he believes in the idea of being Allies for All. Believes this connects with his Christian upbringing and applies to the idea of Human Rights. He shared a flier of an upcoming event at the farm.

Further discussion (summary elements, full discussion may be seen at the video link above):

\*Discussion about how to find employment for disenfranchised people, and difficulty for employers to find workers.

\*Hille asked about barriers Walker has experienced. Walker stated his first post incarceration job was helping Easton-Hogg on the farm, and he had to learn new skills. He had been placed in a halfway house in Richmond, 50 people, like a homeless shelter. Residents have to look for employment, parole officers tell them what they have to do. With COVID they have to do all that by phone. He is 23, did three years, didn’t have Medicare, didn’t know he needed credit, wants to open a business to help pass what he is learning on to others. Barriers to getting hired, people don’t realize that being a returning citizen is a shortcoming. Been here a month and a half, hasn’t seen overt racism, people smile on the street, not like city life. Recommends outreach to companies to encourage hiring returning citizens.

\*Johnson noted that if you have a government contract, you are limited in who you can hire, drug tests and background checks are required, takes 30 days to get approved.

\*Mitchell asked if there are any resources that help an individual that needs to start over, or just start. Transportation is a problem. How do you afford a phone? How do you put in an application online if you don’t have access? It may look easier than it is to get people working. We need referral resources in our community. Asked Walker if he had a driver’s license.

\*Walker went to get a driver’s license with the proper papers but got turned away two times, got a govt ID finally when someone else spoke up for the validity of his papers. License is under indefinite suspension in Ohio due to felony. Going through process to get license here, has to go through Hamilton County to get clearance. Takes many months to get a license back.

\*Bowling suggested Zinnia Hensley with BPD may be a resource. Hille suggested HRC invite Hensley to the next meeting to talk about resources for returning citizens.

\*Easton-Hogg, Johnson and Bland noted issues with public transportation, especially to get to Richmond for appointments. Stinchcomb noted lack of advocacy for disenfranchised groups. Many needed resources are in Richmond. Johnson noted dissatisfaction with some existing resources in the community, particularly regarding transportation. Bland noted difficulty of getting response from industry HR offices. Stinchcomb mentioned Berea Home Village, a resource to help elderly stay in their homes, provides transportation for them. Hille noted Mountain Association can provide resources to start up enterprises.

Discussion of having book reviews or video/movie reviews tabled for future discussion.

Commissioner Comments

No further comments

Comments from visitors

Morris took issue with Governor’s Executive Orders regarding masks. Regarding Fairness, recommended HRC review Kentucky Bill of Rights Section 26 and Section 5 and provided his opinion that the Fairness Ordinance was defeated because Berea was verging into the “lane of individual conscience” and made further comments regarding his interpretation of the Kentucky Constitution. Chair closed further conversation on the topic.

Bowling noted meeting was not posted in newspapers and agenda was not posted on the doors. Chair will communicate with City Clerk regarding notifications.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn, Hille, second Johnson. Adjourned 7:18

Prepared by Peter Hille, Secretary

Approved as submitted at BHRC meeting on October 20, 2021

Gene Stinchcomb, Chair Date